Wesley Memorial *magazine*

from Wesley Memorial Methodist Church, Oxford Winter 2026



The window dedicated to Charles and Eileen Coulson in Wesley Memorial

Peace on earth?

Dear Friends,



As I write this letter the seasons are changing, the clocks are about to change, and we find ourselves moving into darker evenings. There is no avoiding having to live quite a large proportion of our waking life during the hours of darkness, and for some this is a physical reality that can lead to gloom. We move towards the season of Advent hearing the words, "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light" from the prophet Isaiah. In this letter I'd like to reflect briefly on darkness and how our definitions of darkness and light may be expanded beyond a simple binary. What if we could reimagine our understanding of God and the darkness?

After all, Creation began in the dark, with the Spirit hovering over the deep in *Genesis* 1. New creation begins in the dark too, this time, the darkness of Mary's womb, and the darkness of her knowing and unknowing. God is no stranger to doing dazzling things in the darkness. Jesus is born in the night. Nicodemus visits Jesus and is reborn in the creative cover of darkness. Theologian Sarah Coakley makes the case that one of the most ancient ways we come to know God is through the disorientation of darkness. Drawing on the work of the Cappadocian mystic and bishop St Gregory of Nyssa, she says that "human spiritual advance towards intimacy with God as Trinity ultimately leads to an unnerving "darkness – the darkness of incomprehensibility." She comes to call this darkness "dazzling" because to walk into the intimacy of God's darkness is to be dazzled and disoriented from what we know, from our certainties. Mary consents to the dazzling darkness of God to be about her, but also within her very womb.

The season of Advent is a season when, as Cole Arthur Riley, a black womanist theologian writes, "We make space for darkness" and "think about a God who dwelled in the sacred blackness of a womb before being born into the world at Christmas." While darkness is so often maligned and equated to evil — with disastrous sociological and psychological results including racism — it can actually be a place of sacred encounter. In *Isaiah* 45 verse 3, we read, "I will give you the treasures of darkness and riches hidden in secret places, so that you may know that it is I, the Lord, who calls you by your name." There are treasures to be found in the darkness. Riches hidden that are yet unknown.

In her book *The Divine Heart of Darkness: Finding God in the Shadows* the Rev Catherine Bird, a Methodist Minister, writes of darkness as a "companion, a co-conspirator, a muse." She writes of darkness as liberative, creative, and a generative space. She notes in particular that it is after three days of resting in darkness for Jesus that resurrection happens.

Here lies a challenge. In a season where the darkness encroaches, we are dazzled with Christmas lights, with ever more quirky and sparkly decorations (last year I was gifted a glittery croissant for my Christmas tree). Jesus is the light of the world, yet he, like all humanity, is knit together and nurtured in darkness in the womb of a mother, born in the night. Rowan Wiliams captures this idea of God's manifestation both in light and darkness in his poem, 'Advent Calendar', writing:

> "He will come like dark.
> One evening when the bursting red
> December sun draws up the sheet
> and penny-masks its eye to yield
> the star-snowed fields of sky."

What does it mean for you and for me to live in these darker days as followers of Jesus? In Advent, we speak of awaiting the coming of the light, but we continue to acknowledge the darkness. Yes, darkness can be destructive, the place where things are hidden, the place where people feel unsafe, but it can also be a place of treasures yet unknown, gifts yet to be unearthed, hope yet to be reborn and a place of renewal and rest.
Catherine Bird in her 'Meditation in the Dark' writes:



> 'In the darkness we seek the Lord,
> unseen and unknown…
> In the darkness God calls us.
> Calls us to grow.
> Calls us to feed.
> Calls us to pray.
> Calls us to love.
> Calls us to work.
> Calls us to rest.
> For in darkness is the source of resurrection found.
> Do not fear it.
> Do not dread it…
> And although God is light,
> in God total darkness is also."

In the midst of all that Christmas brings, in the busyness and bustle, in the consumerism and the sometimes challenging dynamics of family gatherings, where might we encounter the Saviour of the world? Not only in the light and tinsel and glitter, but in the darkness too. In rest and regeneration, in the shadow of the Holy Spirit. Where do we encounter the glory of the one who lit the stars and who darkens the sky that creation may rest?

My prayer for us all in the midst of this season is that we might see glimpses of God's glory in light and darkness as we celebrate the coming of Christ in our midst.

Wishing you love, hope, and peace in this season,
Rev Miriam Moul

The Dove Window

My mother and father, Eileen and Charles Coulson, were members at Wesley Mem from 1945 to 47 and 1952 to 1997. My family wanted to recognise the importance of Wesley Mem to them and the significant contribution they made to the church — and we decided on a window.

But what window? Paul and I had been with our children to a number of New Year's house parties for overseas students sponsored by Christian Aid, at Hengrave Hall near Bury St Edmunds. In the chapel there was a dove window, and we fell in love with it — the colours, the dove, the light. One day sitting in Wesley Mem, not focussing as much as I should on the sermon, I remembered the window. I wondered if we could install it in one of the small side windows and dedicate it to my parents.

The design, with a dove symbolising peace, felt very appropriate as my parents' faith led them to be Pacifists: my father was a Conscientious Objector in the Second World War; my mother worked towards establishing Peace Studies in Oxford.



The beautiful window is in the Sanctuary, south side under the gallery, alongside two other windows given in memory of members of the church.

My siblings were happy to go ahead, so we contacted the artist Paul Quail. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paul_Quail)
who redesigned the image to fit a Wesley Mem window. It was dedicated by the Revd Philip Beuzeval in a service on 10 September 2000.

I like the idea of the dove representing my parents' spirits flying towards the Communion Table — though I sometimes think it would be more appropriate for the dove to be flying out into the world where my parents lived out their faith in loving their neighbours and working for peace and social justice.

Wendy Spray (née Coulson)

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Don Manley reminds us of Charles Coulson's book, *Science and Christian Belief*, which still stands on his bookshelves!
(See page 18 for Don's review of a new book)

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Editorial

The clocks have just gone back, the dark early evenings are upon us, and our thoughts turn to Advent and "who is hosting Christmas this year?" Our 19th December service called *Blue Christmas* offers a refuge for anyone who finds the season and its various traditions difficult. But don't forget to invite your friends to the Carol Service on 20th December — a perfect time to relax and pray just by listening!

We offer you this collection of reflections and ideas about peace on earth, with more news and articles, and an ingenious puzzle for Christmas Day! Above all, we wish you a peaceful Advent and a very joyful Christmas.

The Editorial team

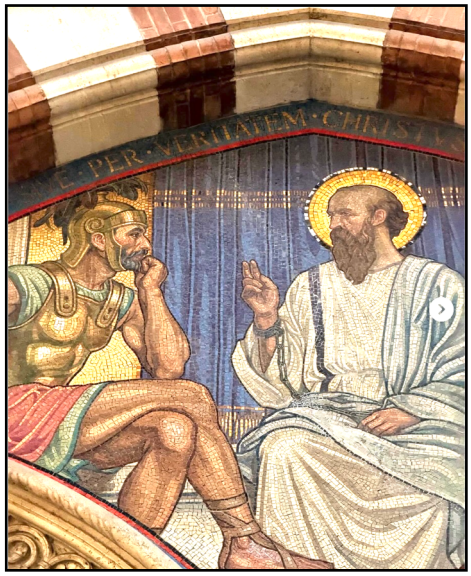
Finding peace

In the fourth chapter of Paul's letter to the Philippians we read: "Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

Nice words about peace, aren't they? Except that Paul writes these words during a time of immense personal crisis. He has been imprisoned for some years because of telling people about Jesus. Because he is a Roman citizen, he has certain rights, one of which is to be tried by the Emperor Nero himself. "I appeal to the Emperor," he proclaimed in *Acts* 25, to which the Governor of Caesarea, one Festus, replied: "You have appealed to the Emperor, to the Emperor you will go."

But it gets worse for Paul. That emperor was none other than Nero, who was bloodthirsty and cruel. It was Nero who had Christians set alight as a grotesque form of flood lighting for the imperial gardens in Rome. And it was probably in Rome, awaiting trial before a crazy dictator, that Paul writes these words about peace. Peace comes to those who pray. The Old English word *wyrgan* is where we get the word *worry*. It means to choke or to strangle. And anxiety can choke our happiness and strangle our joy. Notice that Paul isn't telling us not to worry, he's telling us what to do when we do worry. And that is to pray.

Paul says we should pray with thankfulness. "Count our blessings, name them one by one, and it will surprise us what the Lord has done." And pray with supplications. Our God is a God of mercy and kindness. A heavenly parent who grants his children good gifts. This was an important part of the message of the Sermon on the Mount (*Matthew* 6:25-34), where Jesus says,
"But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not more clothe you — you of little faith?"



A mosaic designed by George Breck in 1909. It is located on the façade of the Church of San Paolo entro le Mura on Via Nazionale, Rome. Saint Paul, in chains, preaches to a Roman soldier

Today, there are new equivalents of Nero. Rarely has the world seemed more uncertain, with aid budgets being diverted to defence spending and the UK population being prepared for some sort of potential conflict. Jesus says, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God" (*Matthew* 5:9). It is the particular calling upon all of us to embody daily that spirit of peace. It will not be easy. Peace is made, rather than maintained. It is costly, requiring sacrifices to put God first, and others before self. It is beyond any human understanding to achieve peace.

Through Christ, however, our hearts and minds will be "guarded" in God's peace (*Philippians* 4:7) — a suggestive military term from an enchained prisoner. What a marvellous promise!

Philip Wilson

Peace on earth

How can one person
bring peace into the world?
We are each so small
and tainted by ‘the flesh'
yet we are made whole
by the one whose love
is poured into our hearts
through the Spirit.

Each peaceful act,
however small,
is a promise to follow
Jesus, and to fill
our hearts with that love.
So let us offer peace
to everyone we meet.

This is not just words
but courage,
if we will risk it,
the strength to stand
before injustice, a flag
billowing with
the power of protest.

It is not just breath
but peace,
if we will live it,
the voice of love
speaking the truth
and acting on
what we say.

Joanna Tulloch

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A Memory



Worship at Wesley Mem 1986

The photograph shows the Reverend Nigel Gilson leading worship at Wesley Memorial in 1986 during his year as President of Conference. Older readers may recognise other well-known Methodists as well…

The photograph was taken from the gallery in the pre-digital age using ‘fast film’ rated at ASA 800 — the equivalent of ISO 800 in twenty-first century photography.

Alan Dobson

Peace on earth

The Christmas Angel Choir understood that by coming to earth to live with us, Jesus was not only glorifying God — he was also bringing us peace.

We are reminded daily, both by the news and through the people we encounter in our paths, that peace on earth is in short supply. As a psychodynamic therapist, I am also acutely aware that even when an immediate physical threat has abated, peace does not automatically return. The effects of trauma linger in both mind and body.

Having spent considerable time inhabiting an anxious, or even destructive and dangerous mind, I deeply recognise the value of a mind at peace. Peace of mind is a gift from God, made accessible to us through the incarnational closeness of Jesus. It is God's will that we experience this peace, yet in my experience it cannot be taken for granted; it is often something we must work hard to cultivate. Through my work as a therapist, I find deep satisfaction in helping bring peace of mind to others, playing my small part in the continuation of Jesus' work.

I work out of a private office on Cowley Road. I meet clients weekly, at the same time each week, for fifty minutes. In my experience, while specific techniques can be helpful, real change stems from the profound experience of being deeply listened to, thought about, and understood — or working through the inevitable moments of being misunderstood — within a close, relational encounter. There is a fitting adage in therapy: "Time doesn't heal; what heals is being thought about thoughtfully over time."

Why did the angels sing peace on earth at Christmas? Peace is not an abstract state or a mere absence of noise; it requires a close encounter with another. It demands relational presence. It is precisely this willingness of Jesus to draw near to us — in all our complexity — that makes real peace possible.

Mark Ellis **********

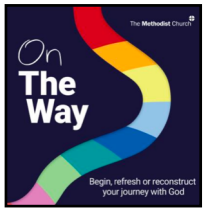
On the Way

We are excited to say we will be running *On The Way,* a course for people exploring Christianity, early in 2027. 'On The Way' is a new course from the Methodist Church, for those wanting to find out more about the Christian faith, ask questions and hopefully begin their own journey of faith. Rev Miriam Moul and Rev Luke McLeod will lead the sessions each Wednesday evening from 6 January to 10 February. The course will be publicised throughout the Circuit, with sessions held at Wesley Mem.
There are lots of ways people can support this exciting venture.

- We will be providing a meal before each session, and Jo Godfrey would love to hear from anyone who can help with cooking, serving or clearing up on any of the dates.
- We hope everyone will be happy to spread the word about *On The Way,* whether that is through physical flyers, putting up posters, sharing posts on social media, or telling people about it. Word of mouth will be really important in encouraging people to come along.
- Please do include *On The Way* in your prayers — that people will come, will encounter God and will want to carry on finding out more.

You can find out more about the course on the Methodist website at On The Way — The Methodist Church. Please note we will be condensing 12 sessions into six evenings, in order to make the timescale manageable. Having run the course once, we will review and potentially offer it again — possibly to students, possibly to those exploring membership of the Methodist Church, or again to those new to faith. It's a very flexible course!

Jenny Ayres
On behalf of the Mission Group



William Tyndale

My wife Jane used to say that there were pieces of music that you couldn't imagine not existing, they seemed to have existed for ever. It can be the same with some forms of words:

"And there were in the same region shepherds abiding in the field and watching their flock by night. And lo the angel of the Lord stood hard by them, and the brightness of the Lord shone round about them, and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, "Be not afraid. Behold I bring you tidings of great joy, that shall come to all the people: for unto you is born this day in the city of David a saviour which is Christ the Lord."

Those words did not always exist. They were first read in 1526, 500 years ago this year, and it was against the law to do so.

The Bible had been translated into the English of Chaucer in the 1370s and 1380s, but it had become associated with heresy, and at a convocation of the English church held in St Frideswide's in Oxford — what is now Christ Church — in 1407, that translation was banned and it was ordered that no further translations were to be made or used without the sanction of a bishop.

Much changed in the 115 years or so which followed. The prohibited Bibles continued to circulate in large numbers, but the language changed so that the English spoken was more like today's English than Chaucer's English. The invention of printing made books cheaper, more plentiful, and more accessible. Above all, advances in scholarship made the text of the New Testament available in its original Greek in a way it had not been before. The older translations had been made from the Latin Vulgate Bible, itself a translation made from the Greek a thousand years before.

In 1523, William Tyndale, who had an Oxford Master's degree, believed the time was ripe for a new translation of the New Testament from the original Greek into English. He sought the necessary permission from the Bishop of London, Cuthbert Tunstall, undoubtedly the most enlightened and learned of the English Bishops. Tunstall refused permission, and Tyndale was left with no option but to go into exile abroad. There, at least technically, the translation would not be illegal.

Tyndale went to Germany, to Luther's Wittenberg, where he probably studied under Philip Melanchthon, the greatest authority on New Testament Greek and Biblical Hebrew in northern Europe.

At the end of 1525, after some sixteen months or so in Wittenberg, Tyndale was ready to publish his translation. He went first to Cologne, but the printing had progressed little beyond Matthew's gospel before the authorities closed it down. Some sheets from that printing survive and are in the British Library.

Tyndale next went to Worms, where the printing of the first English New Testament was completed in the spring of 1526. Three copies remain of this first edition of the New Testament in English. Of these only one is complete, and came to light relatively recently.

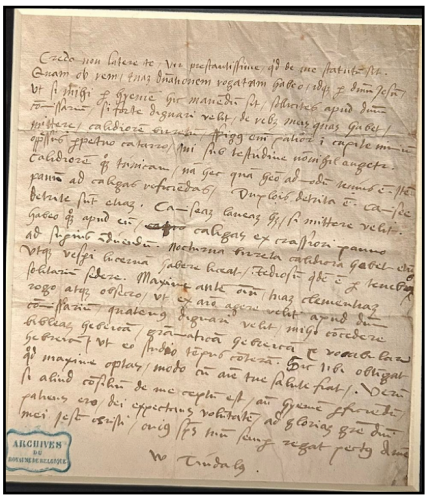
Tyndale next moved to Antwerp where he was to live, more or less continuously for the rest of his life. Antwerp was a great centre of printing, and, too, it had a large English merchant community that could offer Tyndale protection and shelter. A stream of reprints was now smuggled into England from Antwerp, and in 1534 Tyndale produced a new revised edition. At the same time Tyndale was working to translate the Old Testament from the original Hebrew into English.

Meanwhile, in England in the 1520s suppliers of and customers for Tyndale's New Testament were being arrested and prosecuted. From 1530 onwards executions by burning began of some of those convicted. English spies and agents made several attempts to trap Tyndale in Antwerp. They all failed until 1535, when a young Englishman befriended

Tyndale and betrayed him to the authorities. Tyndale was effectively kidnapped and removed from Antwerp and imprisoned in Vilvorde Castle near Brussels. He was imprisoned for over a year whilst charges of heresy were prepared against him.

His imprisonment resulted in the only letter we have in Tyndale's hand, and the only copy of Tyndale's signature. He wrote to the prison governor explaining that he was in poor health and requesting warmer clothes to see him through the winter. But his main concern was elsewhere.

"And I ask to be able to have a lamp in the evening: it is indeed wearisome sitting alone in the dark. But most of all I beg and beseech your clemency to be urgent with the commissary, that he will kindly permit me to have the Hebrew Bible, Hebrew grammar, and Hebrew dictionary, that I may pass the time in study."



The letter

We do not know if the request was granted. He was eventually tried for heresy, found guilty, and executed. He was strangled and his body burnt outside Vilvorde Castle in October 1536.

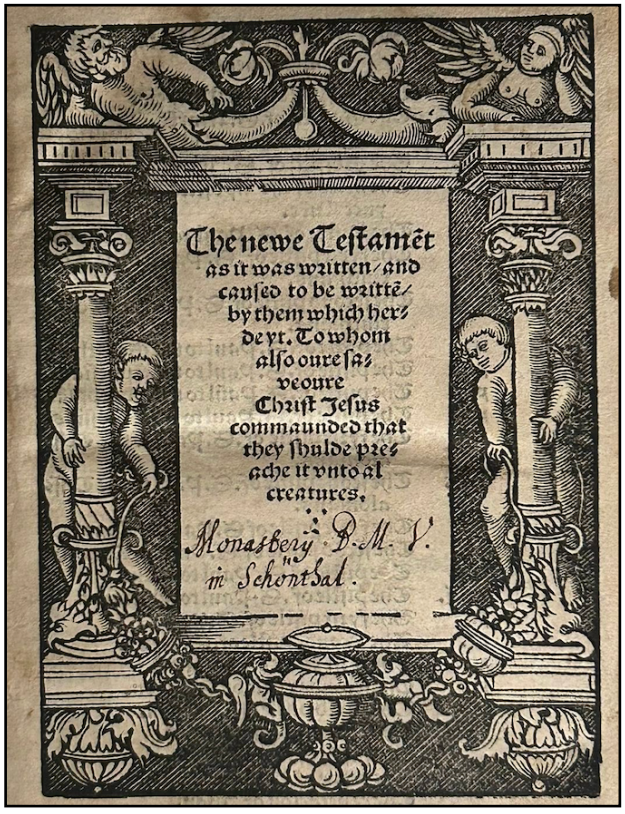
His last words were famously, "O Lord, open the King of England's eyes". In practice they were already opening. His Old Testament which he had only half finished was completed by others and within eighteen months two editions of the whole Bible in English had been published, followed by a royal decree in 1538 that all parish churches were to purchase a complete Bible in English.

That Bible was the direct ancestor of the King James Bible, published in 1611, which was essentially just a revision of Tyndale's work.

A couple of years before the King James version was published, a woman named Rose Lock, by then in her eighties, recalled how her merchant father sent them William Tyndale's New Testament and other books from Antwerp. And how her mother would call Rose and her two sisters into her room, and close the door, and they would read William Tyndale's New Testament secretly together, and be under strict instructions not to tell anyone what they were doing. We know this because Rose wrote down these and other stories so that her children, her grandchildren, and her great grandchildren, whom she had lived to see, would know what it was like to live in a world where it was against the law to read the Bible in English.

To us it seems always to have been there, but it wasn't always so and it was William Tyndale who made it a reality.

Andrew Hope



An elegant title page for the 1534 New Testament

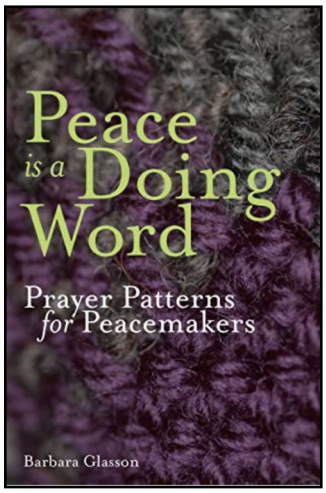
Peace is a doing word

Barbara Glasson, *Peace is a Doing Word: Prayer Patterns for Peacemakers*

Back in the summer I went on a retreat at Ripon College in Cuddesdon, which was organized by the Methodist Community for Spiritual Formation. The theme for the whole of this five-day retreat was 'Practising Peace', which sounded a bit tentative, yet was anything but. There were 47 of us in the audience and three speakers, one of whom introduced us to *visio divina* (or contemplative photography) as a personal commitment to peace, following a naval career in which he was exposed to several places of world conflict, including Afghanistan; then there was one who explored weaving and pilgrimage as contemplative being (with an element of being "on the way"); and the most interesting one by Methodist minister and former President of the Methodist Conference, Barbara Glasson. All of the speakers had books to offer as well, and I came away with two of them. I would like to concentrate on Barbara's book, entitled *Peace is a Doing Word*.

The foreword starts with an epigraph from the letter to the Colossians 3:15: 'Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.' Later, Barbara explains:
'In the verse from Colossians we read "you were called to peace". We can read this as if peace is a noun, a thing to which we aspire, a future hope, but we can also read it as if peace is a verb, "to peace".' This is a strange way of reading it but over the course of the book, Barbara wonders how we can live a way of peace, day by day, evening by evening, in a creative and prayerful way. She asks, "How can we embed peace into the everyday fabric of living, how can we engage in routine and life-transforming patterns of 'doing peace'?"

Barbara's book is divided into twelve sections, covering a whole year, and contains prayers and stories for pondering each day, in a pattern of seven different approaches in each



section: waking, walking, seeing, acting, creating, becoming, and reflecting. It would make an enjoyable companion for those studying it alone, or as a starting point for group discussions.

As Barbara prays in her book, "Open my eyes, open my eyes wide, open them to the injustices of the world, open them to the inequalities between the people, open them to the stupidity of the airwaves, open them to all that pollutes the oxygen, that causes us to choke on the in-breath of the day. Open my eyes, open my eyes wide, get me going into the imperative of today. Open my eyes, keep my eyes wide open all day, I pray."

This is a very promising book by Barbara Glasson, who in the past has received the Archbishop of Canterbury's award for her work as founder of the 'Bread Church' in Liverpool and *Touchstone Bradford* for reconciliation.

Joanna Tulloch

Kupperaj Raju 1927 - 2026



Kupperaj Raju was born and raised in Madras, India but at 21 he went to Singapore where he worked as a logistics administrator for the British army. In 1957 he married Katherine, the love of his life. They shared 61 years of happy married life until Katherine died in 2016.

In 1970 Kupperaj made another brave move when he brought Katherine and his two sons to Oxford. They overcame their share of challenges, and together with Katherine he became a dedicated member of Cowley Road Methodist Church. A long-serving communion steward and supporter of Christian Aid, and a kind, gentle man, Kupperaj was known for his quiet generosity and for welcoming newcomers, particularly those with an Asian background.

The Rajus loved travelling back to Singapore and India as well as to Europe and North America. Their son Alfred lives in California where they especially enjoyed seeing their grandson Max.

After Katherine's death, Kupperaj made a memorable trip to the desert lands of California and Arizona. Back in Oxford, he loved to watch Westerns, as the cowboy country reminded him of what he had seen first-hand.

Kupperaj is deeply missed by his sons, Alfred and Robert, and grandson Max and a group of friends in Oxford who have connections with Singapore.

My friendship with him grew on train journeys to and from Bonn on the Oxford/Bonn Churches link. They had a close friendship with a German Baptist family for about 20 years.

Members and friends of Cowley Road Methodist Church warmly remember Kupperaj, and donations at his funeral raised £650 for Christian Aid.

Mary White

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Wesley Memorial — a growing church



We were delighted to welcome 10 people into full membership of the Methodist Church at Wesley Memorial, in September and October.

It's not all about numbers, as we know, but our current membership is 178, and we relate to 240 households and 355 people in all, counting friends and children as well as those in membership. All are welcome.

Good news to share!

At 3Generate: Meeting Daoud Nassar from the *Tent of Nations*

"We refuse to be enemies"

3Generate, the Methodist Children and Youth Assembly, met at the NEC in Birmingham for a weekend at the beginning of October and it was bigger than ever this year, with 1,800 young people, 500 group leaders and about 350 volunteers. A large group went from this circuit, along with their leaders and they experienced a very full weekend of fun activities, worship and opportunities to be inspired and challenged about faith and justice.

I went to **3Generate** this year as a volunteer helping on the team at the Globe venue and on the prayer team, supporting the worship each day. The Globe was a huge inflatable tent, shaped like an igloo, accommodating a small stage and a discussion space as well as various craft and interactive activities, with a focus on global concerns and peacemaking.

One of the guest speakers at **3Generate** was Daoud Nassar, a Christian Palestinian farmer who lives with his family on his farm near Bethlehem, on the West Bank in Palestine. His farm has become known as the *Tent of Nations*, an educational and ecological family farm that promotes peace and encourages visitors to go and experience how they live out their family motto which is "We refuse to be enemies". This means they live by these four guiding principles:

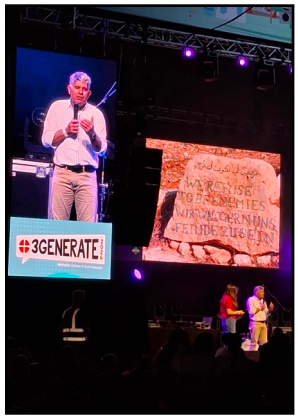
We refuse to be victims
We refuse to hate
We act on our faith
We believe in justice

These principles shape their farming, teaching, and the welcome that happens on the farm.



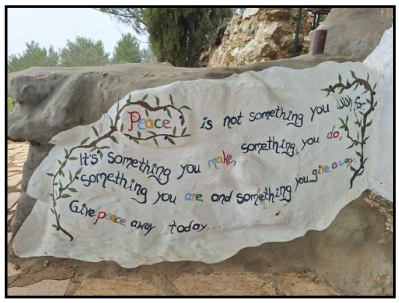
Proclaiming "We refuse to be enemies"

Daoud was interviewed on the mainstage at the worship on Saturday morning, attended by hundreds of young people. Later at lunchtime, I had the privilege to facilitate some informal conversations at the Globe with Daoud and a few of the young people.



Daoud shared what life is like for those living on the West Bank, and how they seek to respond to the growing hardships and violence they experience, with non-violent resistance. He said,
"It was important for me to tell our story, what we are facing as a family there, as Christians, as Palestinians, in this very difficult reality. I wanted to deliver a message of hope to the young generation that, wherever you are, you can make a difference."

Daoud's stone of peace



It was very inspiring to hear Daoud talking about how to live as a peacemaker in the face of injustice. In recent years, his family have faced numerous attacks on their farm from surrounding settlers; they have had hundreds of their olive trees burnt down and property damaged by bulldozers, trying to force them off their land. Despite all this, his conversation focused on responding to conflict in non-violent ways. He has a strong commitment to human rights and peacebuilding and demonstrates an active hope, rooted in faith. Daoud spoke about transforming frustration into positive energy by cultivating both the land

and human relationships, to live a way of life that shows non-violent resistance, following the way of Christ. At the *Tent of Nations* their vision is this: “Hope is not abstract; it is planted, watered, and harvested every day. Every tree planted and every visitor welcomed affirms the simple truth that love is stronger than fear and that peace must begin with how we live, even under occupation”.

Postscript

During conversation at the weekend, Daoud had described how they had to register his family’s land under revised Israeli law, even though they already have historic legal documents that show they own the land. A few days after Daoud returned from **3Generate**, an Israeli Military Committee rejected his farm's land registration application.

The Methodist Church has expressed its grave concern at this decision by an Israeli Military Committee imposing conditions on the *Tent of Nations* which threatens the community's existence. Let us pray for the Nassar family, for the *Tent of Nations* and for all those who seek peace and justice.

More information is available on the Methodist Church website:
https://www.methodist.org.uk/about/news/ion-for-tent-of-nations

Katherine Pickering

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Bladon Junior Church Show

On Monday 26th October, a group from Wesley Mem went to watch this year’s Bladon Junior Church production of *Les Misérables*. Bladon’s annual productions have built a well-deserved reputation for their quality, and this year’s show was certainly no exception. It was an outstanding performance that lived up to, and perhaps even exceeded, our expectations!

Taking on *Les Misérables* is no small ask for any amateur theatre group, but for a group of around thirty-five children of varying ages, it is an especially ambitious challenge. One of the world’s best-loved musicals, based on Victor Hugo’s epic novel, it is a sweeping story of love, loss, redemption, injustice and the resilience of the human spirit, set against the backdrop of 19th-century France. With its powerful score, complex characters and deeply emotional storytelling, it is a production that demands an enormous amount from its performers.

In that context, what Bladon Junior Church achieved was remarkable. The performance was fantastic from start to finish, displaying a level of professionalism, confidence and commitment that would have been impressive in a much more experienced company. The scale of the production, the energy of the cast and the sheer quality of the performances made for a thoroughly engaging and memorable evening.

There are particular challenges in bringing *Les Misérables* to life with a young cast. The music is notoriously demanding, requiring vocal strength, control and emotional expression. The story is complex, with some very mature and challenging themes, and its large ensemble numbers require real discipline, teamwork and coordination. Balancing such a large and diverse group of young performers, giving everyone a meaningful contribution whilst maintaining the emotional intensity and cohesion of the show, is no easy feat. Yet Bladon rose to the challenge brilliantly.

It was wonderful to see the church community continue their tradition of putting on a show every year, providing so many children and young people with the opportunity to develop their talents, build confidence and be part of something bigger than themselves. Their enthusiasm, teamwork and dedication were evident throughout.

(Continued on page 15)

Getting to know you

Three members of the Wesley Mem congregation tell us about their hobbies or pastimes.

Joy Hendry



Members of Wesley Mem may not have seen me as often as you have other Cowley Road friends because I spend part of the year in Scotland, where I also found myself during the Coronavirus lockdown period. Then I was able to join your wonderful online services, so I did get to know some of your faces! I was alone there, with time on my hands, so I decided to try writing a novel, something I had wanted to do all my life. Writing was not the problem, I do that all the time anyway, but could I revive the imagination I remembered having as a child? I called my oldest school friend, with whom I used to make imaginary films, and she encouraged me.

I decided to start with a life I had considered, but did not in the end choose to live, and imagine how it might have turned out if I had. Well, lo and behold, I became so attached to my story that I almost forgot to go out for the daily walks Nicola (Sturgeon) reminded us all to do. That would have been a mistake because the lovely Scottish friends I met (at 2 metres apart of course) also encouraged me, two of them even read (online) chapters as I wrote, and all their names have been used for characters in the book. I didn't make it back to Oxford until we were safely vaccinated with "a little bit of Oxford in my arm", but I did end up writing a trilogy, now published (digitally) on Amazon as two novels in a series called *Sharing Worlds*, and I feel I can call myself a novelist as well as an anthropologist!



Nuala Marshall



Hello! I'm Nuala, and I joined Wesley Memorial in October last year. I'm so grateful for the warm welcome I've received and the supportive community I've found here. I've been asked to write about an interesting hobby as an introduction: fortunately I have one — I play roller derby. Most people have no idea what that is, but in simple terms it's a full-contact sport played on roller skates. Yes, that means bashing into other people while roller skating! We train and play in sports halls, on a flat oval track marked out with painted lines on the floor, and there is no ball! (That's often the first question I'm asked.)

One player (the Jammer) on each team tries to push past four players (the Blockers) on the other team, and they score a point for each Blocker they pass on each lap. It's fast-paced, high-octane and fantastic fun.

If you'd asked me four years ago if I thought this is how I'd spend two nights every week plus regular weekends, I'd have said you were crazy! But when I first (accidentally!) tried out the sport in 2023, I found not only a fun sport, but one of the friendliest, most inclusive communities I'd ever encountered. There's a huge range of ages, body shapes and sizes, genders and sexualities, and everyone has a place. So many roller derby players value the sport for that reason, and it seems to me they've found the kind of community they should also find in church. Joining Wesley Memorial was the first time I felt that I would be able to invite my derby teammates along to church, in confidence they'd be truly welcomed and embraced as they are.

Lawrie Coupland

I've been volunteering at FarmAbility since 2021 in a hands-on role and latterly as a trustee.

FarmAbility is a farm-based charity for adults with learning disabilities and autism. Our members, or co-farmers, are actively involved throughout the year in a range of seasonal farm tasks on six sites around the county. We currently have a base in Wytham, and work with our partners at Sandy Lane, Long Hanborough, Willowbrook, Gagingwell and Blenheim on different days of the week.

It all started for me when I saw a poster on a noticeboard in Wolvercote looking for volunteers — and I jumped at the chance to get involved. It's a real joy to feel part of such a warm, enthusiastic group of co-farmers, programme leaders, volunteers and support workers at Willowbrook Farm on a Tuesday. There's a genuine sense of fun and camaraderie when we share our news from the past week, discuss the tasks of the day, and enjoy the experience of being on the farm together.

Our tasks vary from week to week according to the time of year. We might be trimming a fallen tree, rebuilding the raised beds or digging drainage trenches; sowing seeds, re-potting plants or harvesting crops; mucking out the goats or simply making up boxes for the organic meat deliveries. You never know what's waiting for you!

Apart from the wonderful company, it's also a great chance to get back in touch with nature and share experiences. My personal highlights over the last year include the day we uncovered a nest of new-born, baby fieldmice, and the morning we arrived to the unmistakable call of a cuckoo from the nearby woodland. Magical moments!

EXTRA:

From Nuala — how to see games!

"If you'd like to see some roller derby for yourself, Oxford Roller Derby is hosting two games (against Cambridge Rollerbillies) on 6 December in Abingdon. The ticket link will be on Oxford DailyInfo, and on the Oxford Roller Derby website. https://www.oxfordrollerderby.com"

From Lawrie — a quote from the project's website

Many of our co-farmers experience personal, transformative changes in their lives through being at FarmAbility. The common theme in all of these is individual progression in skills, abilities and confidence, and a growing sense of community…

www.farmability.org.uk



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Huge congratulations to everyone involved — the young cast, the creative team and all those working behind the scenes. This was far more than a commendable children's production. It was a genuinely impressive piece of musical theatre, delivered with passion, polish and real heart. They should all be immensely proud.

Oliver Pearce



The cast

Malcolm Duncan McCulloch 1965-2026



Wesley Memorial people were greatly saddened in June this year by the death of Malcolm. His battle with cancer had lasted only a few months — we found it hard to believe that he was no longer with us, so soon after we had enjoyed his company and his wisdom at church before Easter.

Born and educated in South Africa, Malcolm studied at the University of the Witwatersrand, where he graduated brilliantly with a BSc in Engineering in 1986, and completed a PhD in 1991. He came to Oxford in 1993 to establish what became the Electrical Power Group.

Throughout his career, Malcolm was driven by a determination to find practical solutions to climate change and social inequality. His research focused on making sustainable energy accessible in the developing world and on integrating renewable power generation into existing electricity networks.

As a teacher, Malcolm was inspirational and deeply committed to his students, and as a colleague he was respected and loved. As the Very Revd Professor Sarah Foot, Dean of Christ Church, said: “Malcolm has been at Christ Church for such a long time it is very hard to imagine the College without him. He was one of those people who dominated every room that he was in; his larger-than-life personality made him a wonderful and convivial colleague with whom to lunch or to dine.”

At Wesley Memorial, he contributed in many ways, most visibly as a Communion steward, and technical support for Rockfish. His unforgettable advice to us all at the 2025 Weekend Break at High Leigh was sometimes to forget the ‘to do’ list, and concentrate on the ‘to be’ list!

The cheerful tribute that follows,from his students and colleagues, was sung (to guitar accompaniment) at the very well-attended celebration for his life, held at Wesley Memorial on 16th July.

A tribute to Prof Malcolm McCulloch:

Hey Malcolm...
1. I came to Oxford thinking I was smart
Then Malcolm gently took my work apart;
He’d ask one question, simple as could be,
And somehow change my whole methodology.
Chorus
Hey Malcolm, we’ve all got a tale to tell
Of drafts we thought were going really well;
Till you appeared and. with a thoughtful grin,
Said, “Have you looked at this from another angle, then?”

2. You taught us how to think before we write,
And how to lose an argument just right.
Though every meeting started full of hope,
We’d leave with twenty more things we had to scope

Chorus (twice)

And here is an extensive poem lovingly written by his team.

Our ode to Malcolm (or *Mak’Oluoch* to his Kenyan colleagues) speaks about the significance of Malcolm’s life and how he inspired as a friend, colleague, and mentor leaving a lasting legacy. This poem centres around the six words Malcolm wanted to be remembered by. It was collectively written by his team (just after the deadline).

THE FIXER OF EVERYTHING

“AFRICAN (Rugby for John)
A South African power engineer
In Oxford since ‘93.
Whether it was Strategy or Serendipity,
Opportunity for Synergy,
A Springbok for your career — maybe?

Your branches went far and wide,
From energy to NHS, there's nothing or nowhere you haven't tried,
but the roots were always grounded
in this African child.

MENTOR

Playing the role to many as a mentor,
You became our academic epicentre.

You taught us that all models are wrong
but quite often they are useful.
You pushed us to be bold and score a try:
Your trust in us was beautiful

Handing us your vision
And asking, "What would it take?"
Never saying "that's not possible"
Never berating a mistake.

On Tuesday afternoons we'd reflect
Learning things from each other we didn't expect.
Audacious trust upon us with your vision,
Always encouraging us to fulfil our own mission.

FIRST PRINCIPLES

Excited by new problems to solve
Asking "Let's think carefully":
You dug down to find the root,
Turning complexity into simplicity.

An engineer by heart,
Following the first principle:
Work less by thinking smart.

You knew the rules and how they could bend;
What happened 'normally' was irrelevant
The exceptions are a means to an end.

INSPIRATIONAL

A leading mind that followed every spark
To worlds far away or spires close by.
You inspired all that crossed your path,
Made us all curious and ask the "why".

Your legacy lives on in the ideas you inspire,
A book yet to come that no doubt many will admire.
Right from the first encounter,
You left an impression like no other,
A new way of thinking:
to see systems and society together.

KIND/EMPATHY

The tree you've planted has grown
Living on, watered by your empathy
You'd ask: "should I listen or should I solve?"
Offering endless positivity.

Your joyful enthusiasm that helped our framing
Knowing when to Scrum and when to run,
Allowing for more ideas to come.

Childlike wonder and excitement,
Your passion sparking light:
Restoring faith in ourselves
Never too tired to fight for what's right.

HUMILITY

You would never shy from being wrong
And learning from the world.
All people equal in your eyes
Old, young, rich, poor, boy or girl.

It never mattered where we came from,
But instead what we bring,
We mauled together as one team,
Just hard work, no king.

You embodied *Ubuntu*,
"I am because we are".
The legacy you leave:
The world a better place.
Thank you, Malcolm!
Some people leave memories.
You left a way of thinking."

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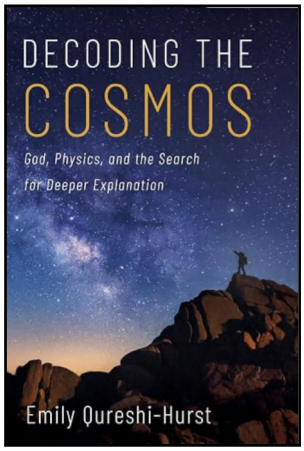
It was a joy and a privilege to know Malcolm.
Thanks be to God!

Decoding the Cosmos; God, Physics and the Search for Deeper Explanation

Emily Qureshi-Hurst (Cascade Books, £21)



Peace on Earth … and Elsewhere?

Has it ever occurred to you that there may exist beings akin to humans on other distant planets, perhaps in other galaxies, or even other universes? If there were, would God become incarnate in each of these worlds or is our Christmas unique? Reading this new book by a Cambridge professor may help you ponder.

Professor Qureshi-Hurst examines the realms of science and theology, recognising that they are separate academic fields, while attempting to map out areas of convergence and those of divergence, all the time recognising that our understanding of either may shift dramatically over time. The author is keen to encourage a conversation and she examines six different Christian concepts (Creation, Design, Providence, Incarnation and Salvation), setting each alongside current scientific thinking. On the way we meet (inter alia) quantum mechanics, relativity, and the way in which Biblical and philosophical ideas about God differ. The author is a self-confessed atheist, but this should not put you off engaging with a lucid text that may help you grapple with difficult issues.

Don Manley

THE GATEHOUSE

Leading Charity working with the homeless and vulnerably housed in Oxford

Did you know in 2025, The Gatehouse ….

- used 2,496 tins of baked beans, which is over a million individual beans
- cooked 9,150 jacket potatoes which would make a column over 15 times the height of Nelson's Column
- was the Number 1 buyer of breaded ham slices in England at Sainsburys
- served over 15,000 meals
- supported over 800 individuals
- has a team of over 300 volunteers

Did you know that The Gatehouse was set up by Oxford City Churches in Nov 1988?

If you'd like to know more, here's a link to their excellent Impact Report https://oxfordgatehouse.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/04/Impact-Report-LOW-RES-FINAL.pdf



Did you also know that Wesley Mem provides five loaves of sandwiches and five cakes every six weeks for the café? That's 450 sandwiches and 45 cakes in a year! We have also usually given hats, scarves, gloves, socks and chocolate towards their Christmas appeal.

Zoe Wright, The Gatehouse Services Manager, has written to say how much they really value each and every donation. She says without our food donations and general support, they just wouldn't be able to help the number of people that they do.

So huge thanks to the 30 volunteers (approx)) at Wesley Mem who regularly contribute food. If anyone would like to join us, please get in touch. Each person/group contributes the food once a term.

Contact: wendy_spray@hotmail.com

Christmas Wordsearch

H D N O I T A R T S I G E R
E E R C E D Y C H I L D M U
T R A Q U I R I N I U S P S
E U O V N G O O D T H E E U
R S O N E A L L I H E A R T
R A W O E N G T E D O B O S
I E M E H E L H T E B I R U
F R H E N U O Y S F O R O G
I T A C M S R O A L J T L U
E R I A T E D J H O E H E A
D T R F I E L D S C S I G N
Y Y E M A N G E R K T O N I
L L E C A E P M E S S I A H
A I R Y S H E P H E R D S I

Find at least 30 words from the Christmas story told in Luke 2: 1-20 (NRSV version)
Words are found horizontally, vertically, diagonally and backwards!
Examples: QUIRINIUS; CHILD; HASTE; HEART; GLORY.
Target: 20 GOOD; 25 VERY GOOD; 30+ EXCELLENT— you've read the chapter!



Forthcoming events at Wesley Memorial:

Sunday morning worship at 10.30 am

Sunday 6th December Young adults' lunch

Sunday 13th December Junior Church presents the Nativity for 2026

Saturday19th December 3pm *Blue Christmas* service

Saturdays 19th December and 26th Oxford Winter Night Shelter at our church, early opening.

Sunday 20th December Annual Traditional Carol service 6.30 pm

Christmas Day 10.30 am worship

Sunday 27th December — no service

Sunday 3rd January Covenant Service

6th January – 10th February (Wednesday evenings 7.00 pm at Wesley Mem) ***On the Way*** course (see page 7)

Friday 22nd January Annual Church Party



Bladon show: la petite Cosette

Wesley Memorial Church

New Inn Hall Street, Oxford OX1 2DH
Web: www.wesleymem.org.uk

Superintendent Minister: The Revd Miriam Moul
Children's, families' & outreach worker: Mel McCulloch
Church manager: Nikos Paplomatas
Church & circuit administrator: Jo Godfrey

Services:	Sunday worship	10.30 am
	Wednesday prayers	12.30 pm

Office open:Monday to Thursday
Tel: 01865 243216
email: officeATOxfordmethodists.org.uk

Wesley Memorial Magazine editorial and production team: Jan Boylan, Janet Forsaith, Alan Dobson, Kate Dobson, Joanna Tulloch, Elizabeth Weatherup
Email us: magazineATwesleymem.org.uk

Contributions, letters, questions, pictures, book reviews and any other items suitable for publication are always welcome. Please email them to the editorial team, stating if you are also willing for them to appear on the church website. Please include photos separately, and check that anyone displayed in a photo is happy to be included in the publication.

All items may be edited by the team.
Articles express the views of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of Wesley Memorial Methodist Church, nor the Methodist Church as a whole.